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HIGH SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

THE word discipline in connection with high school is apt to provoke a feeling of hostility. One naturally associates with the word a set of arbitrary rules backed by severe penalties rigidly enforced. The picture of a training school or a military barrack presents itself, and the mind revolts against dreaded barriers to free development of individual characteristics. The feeling is, however, without warrant. The enforcement of good discipline is necessary in every school, and chiefly in the high school, not only because it secures the proper conditions for work, but because in itself it is of transcendent value.

No person in charge of a schoolroom is a good teacher without being a good ruler. This means securing from the pupil implicit confidence and an earnest desire to accept instruction. The less the effort required to obtain this the better the teacher. That charm of manner produced by a loving, sincere heart and an unselfish devotion to the best interests of the pupil is a chain that holds willing captive many a naturally restive soul. If all teachers possessed this power the question of discipline would never need discussion. But the general lack of it, and the necessity for securing good order nevertheless, demand some rules and their proper enforcement.

Order must be maintained to facilitate study and recitation, to save time and prevent waste of energy. Even if every pupil were anxious to learn, more progress can be made where the hours for study, recitation and play are systematically arranged and carefully observed. Everything that tends to detract from the business of teaching and from the acquirement of knowledge must be eliminated, then the double work can go on smoothly.

But the securing of this important result fades into insignificance when compared with the higher and the truer object of school discipline. The pupil's moral training is its object, and

nowhere can more lasting impressions be made than in the high school. Here boys and girls are in the vital period of life, the transition from childhood to manhood and womanhood. The individual has progressed from a mere curiosity-ruled creature, through the acquisition of memory and imagination and the growth of intellect and will, to the dignity bestowed by the power to form independent judgments.

It is now that his character, determined by his ability to conceive right judgments and to render voluntary obedience, is being definitely shaped. Is this not forgotten when Latin, Greek, English, history, mathematics and sciences are poured into him as though they were the indispensable things of life, and he is governed in his conduct merely so as to render easy this saturation? Their importance is not diminished when we make these pursuits, instead of mere ends, instruments to broaden minds and develop souls.

A high school should not be judged by the intellectual prodigies it turns out, but by the high-mindedness of the young men and women that step forth from its portals. Does a community get better citizens, better fathers and mothers, because of its high school? Are the graduates becoming men to whom a vote is a sacred thing, and women whose ideal it is not to be playthings of society but the equals of men as wielders of power and sharers of burdens?

All this depends upon the discipline of the school—the moral atmosphere that permeates it. In the academic air must be an excess of the divine ether that inspires a voluntary allegiance to higher things.

No conduct is good that is assumed for special occasions. So rules must not only secure order in school, but should induce the habit of good conduct. A strong sense of duty is to be cultivated. The practice of faithfulness in little things, the sole foundation of fidelity in larger, must become an integral part of the personal organism.

No one rule or one teacher can bring this. The trend of the whole school must be in that direction. A knowledge of what

is right is imparted by its constant presentation and wise elucidation. The young mind has become skeptical, no longer believes merely because told, and the hardest lesson to learn is to love right for its own sake. This difficulty frequently leads to the pernicious practice of holding up worldly success as a sufficient reward for right conduct and intellectual acquirement. Obtaining temporary good by false pretences is always a dangerous expedient.

The child acts from desire, therefore the heart must be reached. Purify that by persuasion and the desires springing into life therein will have no taint. It always avails to make this appeal, for within every being exists some of the essence of the Most High. When once the mainspring has been reached the chief work is done, for the will to do right can be nourished by abundant opportunity to act, and its practice will ultimately result in habit. The teacher must be a stimulator and use force only when other means fail. This background authority must exist, and should be a ready and sure resort in time of need ; but the real power will always be in his persuasion, good temper, patience, justice and decision.

It is the habit of good conduct that makes good citizens. Our present citizenship may be good, yet it is woefully poor when compared with the ideal that we are justified in forming from observance of its best examples. What exists in the few can be approximated in the mass, and the high school especially must be its birthplace.

The greatest fault of our American people is lack of reverence for properly constituted authority. With our universal system of popular education it ought to be the least. If the tendency of general education is to make a people feel its individual importance so unduly that each is continually striving to prevent any other man being higher than himself, instead of laboring to secure his own elevation by self-improvement, it fosters a spirit of anarchy and had better be suppressed. Little indeed would be the danger of this, did teachers take to heart Abraham Lincoln's philosophy, and towards its accomplishment direct every energy :

“Let reverence of law be breathed by every mother to the lisping babe that prattles in her lap; let it be taught in the schools, seminaries and colleges; let it be written in primers, spelling-books and almanacs; let it be preached from pulpits and proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice; in short, let it become the religion of the nations.”

These are not the words of an idealist, and the attempt of the teacher to carry out his part would not be vain. What high responsibility they put upon him, and how immeasurably they ennoble a calling whose routine and petty detail often beget despondency! This purpose encourages ever more faithful work at the humbler tasks, but demands that they be made primarily the means for securing the nobler ends. Teach history, mathematics, sciences and languages, but make them help inspire that true liberty which consists in willing obedience to authority, and opens the way to the larger life of devotion to duty.

CHAS. L. BIEDENBACH

OAKLAND HIGH SCHOOL, CAL.